

Going for the Gold: The Making of an Olympic Athlete

James Fennimore Cooper School

PROBLEM OVERVIEW

To provide an environment that meets the nutritional and physical needs, as well as, promoting opportunities that will lead to the adoption of life-long attitudinal and behavioral changes towards sustaining a healthy lifestyle for our urban community, staff, and students. Through formal and informal analysis of our school community, we discovered that: 77 percent of our parents felt that GOOD HEALTH was the most important factor for their children to become successful; 46 percent felt it was eating habits; and 35 percent felt lack of school physical education programs were the number one and two contributing factors to the increased number of children who are overweight/obese. Seventy-eight percent of our parents felt that PHYSICAL EDUCATION classes would help control or prevent the childhood obesity epidemic.

PROGRAM/ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

Our “training coaches” in The Making of an Olympic Athlete included school staff (Healthy Child Committee–Lead), students (Lead by the Healthy Child Team, Jr.), PTO and parent volunteers, and community partnerships with groups such as Children’s Hospital, SAFE KIDS Coalition, American Heart Association, Wisconsin Bicycle Federation, and the Milwaukee Public Schools Recreation Program.

Our approach consisted of four key components: Wellness, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Community Service. These areas of focus were ongoing and integrated into our daily activities, projects, curriculum, and special events. Through working with the students we generated ideas, promoted specific projects, and created lessons that allowed us to incorporate activities in our daily routines. We found this approach allowed us to work towards changing attitudes and behaviors in a subtle, but meaningful manner.

Our targeted audience was the entire Cooper school community. Our aim was to promote healthy lifestyles for our students, staff, and families. Some of our activities addressed healthy food choices, promoted and provided opportunities for individual and family fitness, placed emphasis on nutrition and fitness during the school day, encouraged and supported staff initiatives, as well as, took on a strong campaign to “shoo the flu”!

We evaluate the effectiveness of our activities through formal and informal surveys, participation rates, informal comments, and through community accolades and invitations to serve as resources to other schools/groups. The Governor’s School Health Award created the challenge we needed to get our school in motion, it was our catalyst for change. Our goal of “Gold Level” was the motivating force behind our quest for excellence. This award program encouraged us to evaluate our existing practices and policies to create an action plan so as to meet and exceed the state health and fitness standards.

We continued to build our healthy child team enrollment by having two representatives from each classroom participate. This gave us representation in all grade levels and kept our student base consistent. We continued with our monthly healthy snack days, whereby the students selected the “snack of the month,” which included the month with \$3 a pound bananas.

With the Swine Flu epidemic, we took an active stance on prevention. Students created posters, posted posters and presented to all classrooms on how to “cover the cough”. Playing “caught you covering” were by students who were “caught covering” and were rewarded with stickers and hand sanitizer. We felt our efforts were successful as our attendance during the epidemic decreased by only 1%.

Putting the Fit into Fitness Week:

To coincide with the Olympics, we provided all students with their own "Olympic Training Log" in which students recorded their activity and duration of activity. We created a giant Olympic torch and posted pictures of our Olympic athletes. The highlight of the week was the adaptation by our special education students in the One Man Luge event. In their modification of the event, each student completed the feat by going down the hill behind our playground on a sled. Even the teachers participated. Students with the highest points received our "Healthy Kids Rock" tee-shirt.

Putting the Nut into Nutrition Week:

Similar in concept to the above, we also hosted a week-long Nutrition Week, where students, grades K4 – 6, kept a journal"—check-off sheet of their daily food consumption. Grades 7 and 8 did the same activity; however, their activity lasted a month and was sponsored by Harley Davidson, Milwaukee Public Schools, and Friends of Hank Aaron. Once again, students with the highest points received our "Healthy Kids Rock" tee-shirt.

The Key to Good Health:

Teaming up with the Wisconsin Bicycle Federation, we hosted two official "Walk & Ride to School Days", one in the fall and one in the spring. The fall walk is an international event and our spring walk kicked off a month-long focus on walking and riding your bike to school on a daily basis. Students/ Staff who participate earn punches and upon earning "ten" punches, receive a key chain, key, and foot. Ten additional punches earn additional feet. In addition to the 'walk' students in 5th and 6th grade participated in the two-week long bicycle curriculum sponsored by the federation and our third graders participated in a Bike Rodeo sponsored by the Southeast Wisconsin SAFE KIDS coalition. (As a result of our involvement for a continued time with both groups, our school has been selected to be focus groups for both organizations).

Mad Hot Ballroom and Tap:

Though grant money, our 5th and 6th grade classrooms participated in Danceworks® Mad Hot Ballroom and Tap program. Students received instruction in the two forms of dance, ballroom and tap for twelve weeks at two hours a week. The culminating event was participation in the Mad Hot Ballroom and Tap finals held at the Bradley Center, Milwaukee.

Much of our focus throughout the year was increasing the awareness of eating healthy snacks for both students and staff, increasing the need for taking up a notch the activity level, creating opportunities to reward students with incentives other than food, such as dances or a golf outing, and selecting field trips that are walkable—such as a field trip to our local park for a science investigation.

The rest of our story is pretty much the same. We continue to utilize community resources—our favorites are the Southeast Wisconsin SAFE KIDS Coalition, the Wisconsin Bike Federation, and the Health Education Center (HEC) (Children's Hospital). Our PTO group remains one of our biggest supporters and fans as they help promote and participate in many of our activities. This past year was our second Jack-O-Lantern jaunt which was even more successful than last year judging by the number of participants. Rounding out the year is our annual "field day" in which the PTO supplies the watermelon, parents send nutritious treats, and the students, under the direction of adults, run the events to include old fashion relay races, rope jumping, and running through the sprinkler, to name a few.

Classroom and support teachers continue to integrate fitness, health, and nutrition into their academic curriculum. Highlights of this past year are: an all school production of the Nutcracker performed through dance only, creating an all school rap with the "Figureheads," and promoting being a Cooper Cougar and doing the "cougar bounce." Giant displays of internal organs and looking at the effects of tobacco on lungs, teeth, and breath always bring numerous rounds of "yuks" by our students. Involving

our special education students in “doing the math” with graphing participation rates and creating posters and announcements to promote events is one example of inclusion at its finest. Finally, field trips to the HEC complement many of our educational goals related to health and fitness.

The comments we hear throughout the year pretty much seals the success of our program. When one parent tells us that they are concerned about their daughter’s size and that if it wasn’t for the healthy child club, they would never get them to try fruits or vegetables, or when a student says’ “Mom, I can’t eat that—I am a healthy child, give me an apple,” then we know we are making progress.

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